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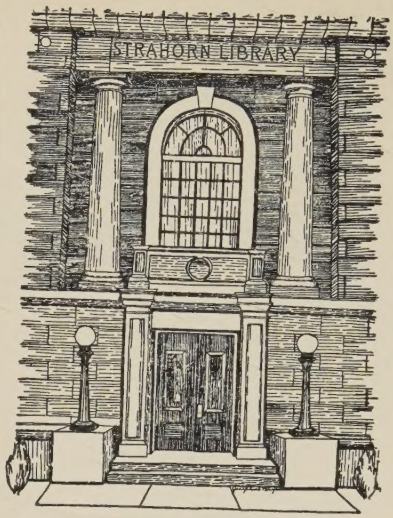
THE PASSING of the DESERT

Irene Welch Grissom



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THE PASSING OF THE DESERT

BY

IRENE WELCH GRISSOM

AUTHOR OF

A DAUGHTER OF THE NORTHWEST

"DOWN BROAD CANAL THE WATERS SWEEP"

THE PASSING OF THE DESERT

BY

IRENE WELCH GRISSOM

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IRENE WELCH GRISSOM

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Irene Welch Grissom

INSCRIBED
TO
THE MEN AND WOMEN
WHO TRANSFORMED
THE GREAT AMERICAN DESERT
INTO A LAND OF
FERTILITY AND BEAUTY

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Photograph by Lambrecht

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THE PASSING OF THE DESERT

THE PASSING OF THE DESERT

PART I

THE PASSING OF THE DESERT

An arid waste the desert lies,
Beneath the dazzling summer skies.
A hot wind stirs, in sudden gust,
Rank clumps of sagebrush gray with dust.
The cactus thorns hide rattlesnakes,
And shrill and clear a warning breaks,
As overhead an eagle sails
His keen eye on the badger trails.

A river roars where a canyon runs,
And carves and cuts, as countless suns
In lonely splendor flame and glow,
And parch the wilderness below.
Untouched by plough or ditch the ground,
No echo wakes to human sound,
A grim and treeless, wind-swept plain
Beyond the zone of cooling rain.

A dreamer comes—as dreamers will—
To watch the swirling torrents spill
Between the steep, black lava walls,
And on the foaming, crashing falls.
He sees the desert, vast and grand,
Give way before a man-made land,
The sparkling streams flash here and there,
And life is springing everywhere.

The vision, shaped by work and thought,
A miracle at last hath wrought!
From far above the canyon deep
Down broad canal the waters sweep;
And happy homes dot fields of green,
With flowering orchard in between;
The waste, reclaimed, is sweet and fair,
With song of birds upon the air.

Now long freight trains speed to and fro,
Where, outward bound, rich harvests flow;
The wires are strung from place to place
That bridge the loneliness of space;
As brief years pass—Lo, cities rise
To greet the flaming sunset skies,
And on the conquered desert sands
A brave young empire proudly stands!

THE MIRAGE

Far out, in blazing noontide heat,
  Across the sandy sea
Appears a blue lake, cool and sweet,
  Green fringed with stately tree.

It fades—a river rolling fast
  As ripples dance and race,
Flows silently and swiftly past,
  And into empty space.

Sometimes a mystic town is seen,
  Clear cut against the sky,
With houses set in misty green,
  And church spires lifted high.

Illusive pictures, desert born,
  Projected on the air
As if the gray waste mocked in scorn
  Man's dream to make it fair.

VANISHED DAYS

THE dashing days of the cattle plain
Have given place to the reign of grain,
Gone is the cowboy with chaps and song,
Gone are the trails that he raced along,
In wild pursuit of the long-horned steer
When came the round-up from far and near.

Then life was free as the winds that blew,
The joys were many and cares were few,
With hand carved saddle and silver bit,
Bright jingling spur and sombrero fit,
The cowboy rode to the faro play
To woo Dame Chance with his comrades gay.

The unfenced plain, with its open lands,
And cattle roaming in mighty bands,
The young, young West of our fathers bold,
Ere came the wheat and its fields of gold,
Lie in a past that has gone its way—
A shining memory of yesterday.

THE IRRIGATOR

A KING of new acres which waited long,
I'm off for the field, and the age-old song
That murmurs and sings when the water clear
Is luring and sparkling in careless cheer.
The ripples are humming as on they go,
Reviving the plants with a silver flow,
A tune that comes lilting down years untold
From ancient Peru and pre-Incas bold.

The ruins are shattered that tell the story
Of primitive people and passing glory;
Yet still there remain, by the stone walls wide,
The mighty canals once a joy and pride.
I wonder if men felt the sense of power,
As they watered crops in their transient hour,
That thrills and exults me when, shovel in hand,
I send the cool streams to a thirsty land?

I feel I am linked with the distant dead
As part in a plan through the ages spread,

And life seems to run in a mystic ring
While watching the ripples that dance and sing.
A past lives again in my haunting dreams
Where dry earth is drinking the same cool streams,
And voices are calling that "Brother!" say—
Salute from the men of a vanished day!

NEIGHBORS

I WATCH for it in shades of night,
The gaily twinkling farm house light
  That throws a cheerful gleam afar.
It brings to me, on gold wings fleet,
A message old and ever sweet:
  "Here stands a friendly door ajar!
Come, neighbor mine, across the field,
We'll talk about our best grain yield,
  And guide the nation's western star."

So, smiling, I put on my hat,
And go to sit awhile and chat,
  As I have done for twenty years.
I reach the door, it opens wide,
A deep voice calls: "Come on inside
  And join with me in rousing cheers!
My Dicklow wheat—I pulled each weed—
Was certified as perfect seed;
  Those words are music in my ears."

A pause to get our pipes aglow,
And then the talk begins to flow!

We settle all affairs of state;
We build a navy that suits us,
And wonder why there is a fuss,
Because the farmers ask a rate
That cuts the one the experts set,
And opens markets closed as yet
By increased cost of railroad freight.

And how we love recalling days
We first came West, and all the ways
We schemed to pay the mortgage grim.
If folks had caught that agent grand,
Who sold them sage and desert sand,
They'd torn his body limb from limb!
We chuckle low—the fertile soil
With mighty crops has blessed our toil;
In kindly words we speak of him.

The clock strikes ten, it's time to go,
I take my hat and, "Good-night, Joe,"
I say, and clasp his hand in mine,
And look in his clear eyes and see
The loyal friend he's been to me
In all these years of rain and shine.
And then we know it's good to live!
Since God to man this gift will give—
A neighbor steadfast, true and fine.

SOLITUDE

AFAR on the prairie I love to ride,
And dream in the sun with none by my side,
To race the fleet wind that stirs the dry grass
Low bending to earth as swiftly we pass.
Away—on we dash—my bronco and I!
And now a low butte goes hurrying by,
We pause at the lonely alkali lake,
No wild-fowl lives there its silence to break;

The reeds growing tall along the low bank,
Brown sentinels marching in stately rank,
Keep sinister guard of cruel quicksands
That ever reach up with death clinging hands.
We follow the lure of a dim, winding trail,
Outstripping the dust that sweeps on the gale,
And flee from our toil, with its daily grind,
Till worry and care are left far behind.

Yet homeward we go as darkness unfolds,
To seek once again the duty life holds,
And leaving the call of solitude vast,
We gallop a road well traveled at last.

I revelled in freedom—pulse beating high
Out under the mighty wilderness sky;
But heart cries to heart as black grows the night,
I welcome the glow of windows alight.

THE OUTLAW

They brought him in, the wild, the fleet,
And nailed iron shoes upon his feet,
And on his shoulder burned their brand.
They bridled him with reckless hand,
The saddle girth drew close and tight,
"He's bad," they said, "he'll make a fight!"
Then cried: "Now who will ride the brute?
Come on, you sports, make ready, shoot!"

From out the crowd there stepped alone
A man that never horse had thrown,
With beaded chaps and gay silk shirt,
Sombrero wide and braided quirt.
The range-horse heard his jingling spur,
And felt deep fear within him stir.
He trembled, shook in every limb,
No friend he had—none cared for him.

What's this strange weight flung on his back?
A shout goes up: "Hang to him, Mac!"
He snorted wildly, tossed his head,
A plunge—and now his flanks run red!

And then he fought, gone mad with pain,
Against the quirt, the spur and rein.
A shout—a thud—the rider lies
With dead face turned up to the skies.

Men cursed the bay horse standing there
With bloody mouth and foam flecked hair.
A strong corral they turned him in,
And said: "We'll break you yet! You win
To-day, but wait, O bold outlaw!"
With pain crazed eyes, and trembling jaw,
He watched the crowd, for still he felt
The wounds the quirt and spur had dealt.

And so his name went all about
Till many riders tried him out;
Each "Frontier Day" he won new fame,
And brought fresh skill to the cruel game.
He fought as never steed before,
Full oft his sides ran red with gore,
Men hated him, he hated men
That held him in a prison pen.

There came one day to the cattle ranch,
Jim Gray, from up Lost River Branch,
A quiet man with kindly eyes,
Of unassuming, sober guise.
And after supper, late that night,
When cards were done and pipes alight,
He made a deal that all could hear
As through the noise his voice rang clear:

"With quirt and spur both laid aside,
For full an hour the horse I'll ride,
And not be thrown. When this I've done
The outlaw's mine, and fairly won!"
The boss and all the bunk-house gang
Surrounded him, and loudly sang:
"We sure are glad you came our way!
Good luck to you, here's how, Jim Gray!"

Next morning ere the sun was high
A strange man passed the outlaw by.
He turned—repassed—then paused to press
A gentle hand, in firm caress,
Against the quivering, velvet nose.
The startled horse on hind feet rose,
Then trembling crouched, as from a blow;
Strange words were spoken, soothing, low:

"Be still, old chap, I'll not hurt you,
I'll be a friend that's stanch and true."
The gentle voice—the kindly hand—
Unknown before in his grim land—
He ceased to tremble, stood at rest,
And Jim Gray said: "I've made the test!
To-morrow we will ride away,
You're mine, I love you, clean limbed bay!"

They gathered in a crowd again
To watch the outlaw, all the men

That he had conquered by his skill.
Submissive, now, to this man's will,
Gone cruel spur, quirt's savage hit,
He took the saddle, bridle bit,
With wistful eyes that seemed to say:
"I've trusted you, be true, Jim Gray!"

The master spoke, a single word,
Deep silence fell, no voice was heard.
He mounted slowly, then rode past
The group of men, and ringing fast
Their cheers arose: "Gray did the deed!
How strange, he looks a noble steed!"
And long they stood, and watched the two
Until they vanished in the blue.

A FRIEND ON GUARD

WIDE scattered lie the placid sheep,
White dots which deck the noontide plain,
The heavy air is hushed with sleep,
And low hung clouds hold promised rain.
The bright heat floats in dizzy waves
That meet the sky-line far away,
A gaunt and hungry coyote raves—
To voice his hatred of the day.

Fed by a spring that never fails
A lone tree marks the water hole.
The wind among the branches wails
A solemn requiem for the soul
That cannot reach the crystal spring.
A buzzard circles overhead,
And wheels and dips on somber wing
To scan the plain for helpless dead.

A lonely form the herder stands,
And looks beyond the flock of sheep;
He dreams—perchance—of other lands,
And forests rising cool and deep.

With eager, watching, brave brown eyes,
A shepherd dog lies at his feet;
A friend on guard, steadfast and wise,
He smiles—for now their glances meet!

THE COYOTE'S CRY

When the silver stars shine cold and bright,
And the snow-clad earth gleams misty white,
The coyote goes forth to prowl.
A creature that seeks to rend and kill,
A sinister shape upon the hill,
He utters a wailing howl.

He scents far below a flock of sheep,
And slinking his way through shadows deep,
He glares at a huddled fold.
Then a lamp shines on the crusted snow,
And shatters the night with its cheerful glow
As a dog barks defiance bold.

His cowardly heart is chilled with fright,
When he sees the yellow streak of light
Where the shepherd guards with care.
He sullenly shrills his weird alarm,
The terrified sheep are safe from harm,
The cry is lost on the air.

A DESERT FLOWER

On a sun-baked and sandy plain,
Where no cooling water flows,
Beyond the breath of fragrant rain,
A flower of beauty blows.
It lifts a brave and dauntless head,
And spreads the petals fair
Above a cruel, thorny bed,
To the scorching desert air.

The lizard darts close to its side,
And the horned toad idly suns,
The rattlesnakes glitter, glide and slide,
The poison centipede runs.
White bones lie in a gruesome heap
By blossoms of pink and gold,
High overhead the buzzards sweep—
Winged-tragedy ages old.

And in this dreary, barren place,
The cactus flower grows,
Serene in beauty, with the grace
Of a petted hothouse rose.

THE PROSPECTOR

Scent o' sage and a coyote's song,
  Silver sand in moonlit gleam,
Golden days that drift along—
  One vision all supreme.

Flapjacks and bacon frying
  In smoke of eventide,
A hot wind softly sighing,
  Gray silence brooding wide.

Saw-toothed peaks and lava slopes,
  The heat which comes with noon,
Still the eager, ardent hopes—
  Vast wealth shall be his soon.

Defeat recedes and distant, dim,
  His victory looms before,
Bright dreams lure and beckon him,
  The desert speaks her lore.

He follows illusion's sweep
  On and on—he cannot fail!
Under the sand—fast asleep—
  The end of the last long trail!

THE DESERT DEAD

Close by—a hill of shifting sand,
Wide stretching sweep of arid land,
Far, far away blue mountains stand,
These guard the desert dead.

The stars move calmly overhead,
Suns rise and set, above the bed
A shining haze is lightly spread
To soothe the lonely dead.

About the cross the gray sands heap,
As restlessly they crawl and creep,
Until the name is buried deep,
That marks the barren grave.

And never there a human sound
Drifts low across the narrow mound,
Where weary winds sweep round and round,
And mourn the desert dead.

And yet—doubt not they sleep as well,
Beneath the grim land's mystic spell,
As if they lay in silvan dell,
The lonely, desert dead.

ABOVE THE TIMBER LINE

STRANGE, twisted pines, grotesque and gaunt,
Grim crags the eagles haunt,
To rear their young where wild winds sweep
Sharp peaks and gorges deep.
They wheel and scream, and boldly sail
The lashing, rending gale.

At times the wind sinks down to rest
Upon the mountain's breast,
And silence falls so deep, profound,
There is not heard a sound.
Crash! thunder like a cannon's boom!
A rock leaps to its doom.

The peaks are hung with somber clouds,
That seem dark winding shrouds,
The air is filled with blinding snow—
A flash! then sunlit glow!
A lofty place of many moods,
Where danger ever broods.

The sturdy one, the mountaineer
With brave heart free from fear,

Who solitude majestic seeks,
  Knows well this land of peaks;
The far, unconquered heights divine
  Above the timber line.

WHITE WATER

Dashing and splashing along the way,
Flashing its wings of shining spray,
The river rolls in its rocky bed
Adown the mountain; far overhead
A snow-clad peak, with splendid sweep,
Lifts from the forest dark and deep.

Tall ferns, each glad green leaf astir,
March on the banks; a mighty fir
Rocks to the lullaby of the breeze
That wanders there among the trees,
The leafy arms are tossing high,
As if to touch the deep blue sky.

Huge rocks, that glint in fitful gleam,
Bedeck the path of the foaming stream,
The shadows dark, and sunbeams gay,
Above the waters dance and play;
Leaping and tumbling, wild and free,
Away it sweeps to the distant sea!

INLAND

When the corn blades curl, as the hot winds whirl
Across the wide, flat space,
And the dry earth gasps, as the great sun clasps
The fields in fierce embrace,
Then I idly dream of the sails that gleam,
Where whitecaps dance in glee,
And the forest creeps to the tide that sweeps
In from the sounding sea.

O the glad waves sing and the gray gulls wing,
A ship is homeward bound,
With the mystic light of a rainbow bright,
The rocks, where huge swells pound,
Fling a mist on high up against the sky,
Aglow with colors gay,
And the cool sea breeze, in the dark fir trees,
Goes humming on its way.

Some day I'll return where the sunsets burn
Above the ocean blue,

And green forests stand in a splendor grand,
All bathed in rosy hue,
For a far voice calls when the twilight falls
To darken day's fierce fire:
"Now the white ships ride on the rippling tide—
Come—seek your heart's desire!"

SPRING ON THE YUKON

Long days ablaze with golden light,
Red dawn in the morning by three,
The chirp of crickets in the night,
Bursting buds on the aspen tree.

The murmur of water running
In hidden fountain and rill,
Crawling things that come a-sunning,
Drum-drum of a woodpecker's bill.

Chatter of squirrel, and call of wild-fowls
From the southland winging their way,
In forest depths weird hoot of owls,
Birds singing their mating lay.

The sap is rising in the pines,
Shrubs and vines wear a garb of green,
Floating ice in the river shines,
Reflecting a silver sheen.

The earth once more with food is rife,
Gone now the ghostly silence long,
The chorus of awakening life
Rises high in a grand spring song.

THE CALL

It comes to me in dreams at night,
The memory of that land,
I see the flaming Northern Light,
The distant caribou band.

The stars flash in a gay frost dance,
White silence broods over all,
I feel once more the thrill of chance,
The hidden gold's siren call.

O Frozen Northland, where men die
Gripped in your merciless cold,
Your lure is stronger far than I—
Away to the Land of Gold!

A TOTEM POLE

THERE stands in a busy city street,
Where careless crowds ebb and flow,
A tribal record unique, complete,
That tells of the long ago.

It was taken from a lonely place
In the Northland far and cold;
Fair "Pioneer Square" men wished to grace
With the token weird and old.

Worn is the pole where the figures stare
With strange and sinister look,
And each rude symbol carved crudely there
Is part of the tribal book.

That was the season the famine came,
When they suffered, starved, and died!
And this the year that abundant game
Met the hunters far and wide.

Here they fought till the enemy fled,
The battle raged fierce and long;
They mourned their brave and gallant dead—
Followed days of feasting and song.

This is the time that the Pale Face proud
  Came with his whisky and gun;
When he took their furs he left a shroud,
  And carved, "Now your race is run!"

THE CAMP FIRE

The sparks drift upward red and gold,
Dark firs stand guard against the sky,
Far off a wolf yelps sharp and bold,
My faithful dog makes brave reply.

I hear the river rushing by,
In fancy catch the teasing gleam
Of trout which play around my fly,
Then gaily dart adown the stream.

The wind among the rustling leaves
Sounds low and sweet the forest lyre,
The rising moon peeps through the trees
To watch me dream beside the fire.

My heart then drinks the full content
That heals a mind depressed and sore.
Deep in the woods I pitch my tent,
And draw new strength from nature's store.

TREES

THEN said Jehovah unto men:
"I will set in the desert the green fir tree,
The pine and the box together shall be,
Where the fragrant boughs of the cedar swing
Shall dwell all the fowl of every wing;
Thou shalt not destroy, when the nations fight,
A tree good for food or pleasant to sight:
For this is the law of your earthly span,
The tree of the field is the life of man."

Thus spoke Jehovah unto men.

BREAKING THE PRAIRIE

A LONELY house against the sky,
Where weary winds drift by,
Gray, nodding grass, sun-cured and dry,
Wild geese that southward fly;

A long, brown furrow, fresh-turned sod,
The plough where buffalo trod,
A man, with courage born of God,
Who breaks the prairie sod;

A winter faced with heart full bold,
Despite the ruthless cold,
For safely will the good ground hold
Seed sown in fertile mould;

A gay, blue day, and fair, green plain,
Cloud ships that bring sweet rain,
A joy so keen it touches pain,
For spring wakes life again;

A shining field, where acres wear
Gold-cloth of beauty rare,
The yellow grain is waving there,
Rich food a world shall share.

The lonely house against the sky,
  A signal stands on high—
A splendid city yet shall lie
  Where weary winds drift by.

WHEN THE RAILROAD COMES

A CRUDE and ugly prairie town
  Reflects the light of summer's sun.
An idle wind drifts slowly down
  The dusty street, where children run
And shout, and play their joyous games.
  No beauty greets day's searching gleam;
On Main Street rise square wooden frames,
  The business block; there stands a team
All wet with sweat, of shaggy limb.
  Their sunburned master wears a smile,
For this bare town means much to him.
  It cuts the haul, by many a mile,
Of splendid crops from fertile lands,
  And brings world markets to his door.
Where small and low the depot stands,
  His eyes see beauty that is more
Sublime to him than marble halls.
  That long freight train, just pulling in,
Fills him with joy; he loudly calls
  Gay words to greet the crew, they grin,
And make response he dimly hears

Through clanging bell and grinding wheels.
The sounds are music to his ears;
And standing there contentment steals
To every chamber of his mind.
For that bleak town, unpainted, new,
He sees a future fair unwind.
He casts his vision, keen and true,
Down years to come, and sees paved street
And noble trees, great gray stone blocks,
And stately homes loom in the heat.
A kingdom's door the steel unlocks!

THE DROUTH

For rain the sad earth sighed, as day by day
The blazing sun wheeled on a cloudless way.
In tall whirlwinds, that seemed to reach the sky,
White clouds of dust went swirling swiftly by.

The grass, once green, was lifeless, crisp and
brown,
No sweet dew fell, and when the sun went down
A heat was left that lingered into night,
Till golden stars flashed out their mocking light.

The men went forth with faces drawn and gray,
And children ceased to laugh at work or play,
The cattle stood with weary, drooping head,
As one by one they numbered with the dead.

And now—across the melancholy plain,
Abandoning at last all hope of rain,
In straggling line the covered wagons creep,
Where men and women sit in silence deep.

Behind them lie their homes of toil-filled years,
Before them looms a land of unknown fears—
How strange, divinely wonderful it seems,
That in their eyes the light of hope still gleams!

THE DICTATOR

O GREAT proud cities that boast of power,
Pointing in pride where stately blocks tower,
Eagerly counting the coin in your vaults,
Hugging your virtues, ignoring the faults,
Smiling you say to the farmer humble:
"Hear the mighty city roar and rumble,
As surges a great industrial life,
And factories hum with energy rife.
See the crowds that throng in each busy street,
The wealth that the keen and successful meet!
We swing the nation with power we hold
In our might of numbers and stacks of gold."

And the farmer says to the city gay:
"If I should go at the end of to-day,
Your banks would crumble, your gold disappear,
Your streets become empty, grass-grown and drear,
I laugh at your blocks that proudly tower!
I am the one who should boast of power!

The life of the world is held in my hands
For I grow its food on my fertile lands.
I am the farmer who meets hunger's call,
I am the dictator, I feed you all.

A PIONEER WOMAN

A STATUE stands in a city block—
  It is called, "The Pioneer,"—
Of a rugged man, with an old flintlock,
  And a cap from the skin of a deer.
His eyes look out to the misty sweep
  Of solitudes vast and grand,
He sees great plains and the forests deep,
  A wide ocean's shifting sand.
His gaze is bold, and erect his form,
  Plain moulded his features, and strong,
A man to breast the raging storm,
  Well worthy of honor and song.
Then—musing long—I seem to see
  The firm lips moving in speech,
And I hear these words come full and free:
  "Go forth my message to teach!

"A statue should stand, here by my side,
  That pioneer woman brave;
The wife who bore me children, and died,
  And lies in an unmarked grave.

"She toiled with willing and faithful hands
  In cabin, in forest and field,
And helped to wrest, from the savage lands,
  A home, to become our shield

From fierce things prowling when night shut
down,
From storms that swept black and wild.
Her face was free from a sullen frown,
She cherished each wee, new child,
As a soul from God, sent here on earth
To have a share in the toil
Of giving an empire honored birth.
She dreamed that the fertile soil
Would teem with homes, and the millions live
Where only wild creatures ran.
Go tell the world that the women give
In an equal share with man!

"Then place my mate close by my side,
That pioneer woman brave;
The wife who bore me children, and died,
And lies in an unmarked grave."

HOMESTEAD LAND

They dot the plain in somber tones,
Tarred-paper shacks, flat roofed and low;
There lies a pile of sun-bleached bones,
In days long gone a buffalo
Lay down to die, on went the herd,
Nor knew, nor cared, that one was gone.
In yonder weeds a lonely bird,
A turtle dove, with one-note song,
Keeps calling, calling to her mate—
Coo-coo, in sad and mournful cry—
"O come, my love, no longer wait!"
The rustling grass, short, crisp and dry,
Bends low to greet the summer breeze,
Down where the sluggish river goes,
Rise cool and green the gnarled old trees
That watch the water as it flows.
Around each house run wide, ploughed lands,
On guard against the prairie fires;
To mark the bounds a rude fence stands,
Strung with three barbed and rusty wires.
Gray puffs of dust rise here and there,
In tiny whirlwinds, round and round,
They drift above the brown fields bare.
No hint, there seems, of promise found

By those who seek unconquered space
To build their home where all is new.
Yet they know dreams of wondrous grace,
The prophecy of hopes come true.
Their eyes look out, and far beyond,
The barren waste of grave to-day.
They see as if a magic wand
Had touched the place: the earth is gay
With heavy crops of yellow wheat,
And fragrant, green alfalfa field,
Where busy bees sip clear drops sweet
From purple glands that honey yield.
A fair white house, of many rooms,
Blots out the crude, tarred-paper shack;
A flower garden, bright with blooms,
Delights the day; cool shadows black
Are cast where stately trees grow tall.
In big, red barns, with great hay mows,
Each standing in a dry, clean stall,
Are horses sleek and dairy cows.
The children play in orchards fair,
As clear and glad their call uplifts.

God's chosen ones are these, who dare
To storm the wild, and wrest its gifts
From out the grasp of frontier plains:
The leaders brave who go before
To mark the way—whose hard-won gains
Fling open wide a barred, locked door.

UNDER THE OPEN SKY

PART II

A PROPHECY

I HEAR to-day my bluebird's note,
While gray and old the sullen snow
Still lingers on, and feeds the flow
Of muddy streams where ice cakes float.
No hint of spring smiles in the sky,
As winter's own the storm clouds fly.
He sings, though trees toss branches bare,
And brown earth shows but here and there,
A prophecy, a promise fair.

In burst of glad, exultant glee,
He tells the world that frost and death
Will vanish on the south wind's breath;
The leaf buds wake on shrub and tree,
And all the lands laugh into flower
In fragrant June's gay, golden hour.
O bluebird, when your bright wings shine,
Your gallant heart speaks unto mine,
And gives me of your faith divine.

WIND IN THE NIGHT

The wind crept out of the heart o' night,
And gaily scampered to and fro,
It shook the trees with a sudden might,
Then sang a lullaby low.

It curled the dark water in restless waves
That broke into white-winged foam,
It rustled the grass on the lonely graves,
And shrieked past a stately home.

All through the night it played hide-and-seek
With the moonbeams cold and pale,
It swayed loose doors with a strange, odd creak,
And billowed a home-set sail.

Over the sea, with exultant swing,
It swept on a boundless quest,
For countless miles, on a tireless wing,
Till the rosy dawn said, "Rest!"

THE HEALER

Grief has fettered and wounded me,
  Physician Nature, heal my soul!
O stately fir, with balm of tree,
  Mend cruel hurts, and make me whole.

Mighty river, swiftly flowing,
  Bear my tears away on your breast,
Green hill in the sunshine glowing,
  Lift my pain beyond your crest.

Gay bird that sings in happy glee,
  Renew my faith in all mankind:
Great Forest World, bring peace to me
  That breaks the cords which fret and bind.

SPIDER WEBS

A SPARKLE in the morning light—
Where crystal dew drops, shining bright,
Bedeck the web the spider weaves,
And hangs among the deep green leaves.

The warp and woof of silver strands,
And diamonds strung in gleaming bands,
Make jeweled lace that fairies wear
Twined in and out their golden hair.

Sometimes across the blushing rose,
A silken veil the spider throws,
To shield it from a wooer bold,
A butterfly of black and gold.

When all the world is hushed in dreams,
Dark shadows waltz with gay moonbeams;
Then, keeping time to mystic tread,
The spiders spin their gossamer thread.

SONG SPARROWS

Of lowly mien
They're often seen
On fences and in hedges green;
No colors fair,
Tints rich or rare,
Bedeck the sober garb they wear.

Of simple things
Each meek bird sings,
At twilight hour the music rings,
As drifts along,
From happy throng,
A lullaby, their good-night song.

SUMMER

SUMMER is laughing across the sky,
Laughing while winds blow merrily by,
Swift runs the river in silver sheen,
Bordered with banks of emerald green.

A bright bird sings in a dark fir tree,
And rocks and swings with riotous glee,
A nest is there in the branches deep
Where tiny birds shall softly peep.

Children are playing just over the way,
Calling with voices happy and gay,
The glad fields echo the ringing cry,
Swinging the laughter—now low—now high!

In joy and beauty and lilting song,
The days wing swiftly their way along,
Fling to the past every tear and sigh—
Summer is laughing across the sky!

INDIAN SUMMER

Day is asleep on a sun-crowned hill,
And the golden hours are hushed and still;
The shining river and warm wide field,
The earth and air a harmony yield,
That soothes the soul into pure delight
With a gracious world serenely bright.

The fleecy clouds idly float on high—
Or sweetly dream in the deep blue sky;
Grand, tranquil thoughts seem to fill the space,
There lies o'er all ineffable grace—
As if God whispered: "Be at rest!"
And nature heard the kind behest.

WEARINESS

O WHEN will the trees put forth their leaves,
And the world glow warm and bright!
I'm weary of snow, and winds that blow,
Crying wildly all the night.

So long are the hours since birds and flowers
Fluttered south where skies are blue;
The world is in gray, and the sun's faint ray
Shatters clouds of murky hue.

Grim Winter, I pray, haste on your way,
Giving place to Springtime fair,
For hearts that are sad grow brave and glad,
When new life gleams everywhere.

THE ZERO HOUR

In the dark cold night, a skillful hand
On my window traced a fair white land,
Of gossamer grass and graceful ferns,
And a winding road that twists and turns
Up a mountain side, where tall pines grow,
Their delicate branches piled with snow;
And a tiny church is gleaming there,
In among the trees—a morning prayer.

With a dash and flash of sparkling rays,
The sun on the picture gaily plays,
And the trees and ferns and airy grass
Slowly melt away, and sadly pass
In a mist of tears, that drench the pane
Like the long-forgotten summer rain;
But the little church that cannot stay
In my heart will live for many a day.

ODE TO THE MARCH WIND

O WIND, do you never grow weary
Of wailing incessant and dreary?
The dust sweeping by in fitful clouds,
Seems dead hopes clothed in misty shrouds;
You tear at all that blocks the way,
And shake the trees that bend and sway,
To writhe beneath your storm-mad touch
That rips and rends with ruthless clutch.

O wind, I pray you, the tempest cease!
Fold your restless wings and give me peace,
I long for silence, with soothing calm,
That heals the spirit like fragrant balm.
Shriek no more in my chimney at night,
With eerie cry that wakes me in fright.
If you must blow, go seek some cave
Where I cannot hear you storm and rave.

APRIL

The gay blue bird is winging, and soft green
grass is springing,
The meadows larks are singing, to set the
world a-ringing.

The wild geese north are flying, two leaders
brave keep vying,
To guide where lakes are lying that stir to
winds soft sighing.

The bumble bee is coming, to sup with busy
humming,
And croaking frogs sit sunning where rivulets
are running.

Away with dark designing and hearts to grief
resigning!
When April's sun is shining mankind shall
cease repining.

THE SONG OF SPRING

The little brook laughed for the spring had
come,
And soft on the breeze was the insects' hum,
Among the bright blossoms the glad birds sang
Until the far hills and the welkin rang,
Atop the low bank, on a sun-warmed log,
Deep croaking his joy was a bright green frog,
And butterflies waked from their dream of
death,
To glitter like gems with a living breath.

The little brook laughed in its silver throat,
The shimmering world caught the rippling note,
To blend with the music of singing birds,
And soft sighing wind, in a hymn without
words.
The earth was a riot of shining light
And fragrance which flowed from the branches
white;
The song that ascended the golden air
Gave worship to God, in an anthem rare.

THE NIGHT DANCERS

The moonlight and the shadow things
crept forth one night to play,
With rustling stir of many wings,
strange creatures weird and gay.
The shadows flickered, fluttered low
in dark boughs of a tree,
They chased the moonbeams, all aglow,
and laughed in eerie glee.

A white mist heard the joyous sound
and thither swiftly came,
With stealthy sweep along the ground,
to join the mystic game.
The shadows, mist and moonbeams bright,
began a ghostly dance,
They capered round a phantom light
in airy, sprightly prance.

They frolicked through the hours long
till out went moon and stars,
A bird commenced his morning song,
as dawn knocked at night's bars;

They softly fluttered far away,
this queer, fantastic band,
Beyond the rosy rim of day,
to seek a sunless land.

LINES TO A BUTTERFLY

You are the star of the insect race,
Winging the air in your jeweled grace,
Sipping the flowers with rare delight,
Meeting your lover in happy flight,
Living a glorious summer day,
Ere gray dusk falls and you pass away.

You bring new health to my weary soul:
Your fleeting beauty, as seasons roll
Changeless becomes; your kin shall be seen,
In that same glory of silken sheen,
Year after year, when the glowing sun
Wakes them to life, O radiant one.

LONGINGS

I WISH I could touch the rainbow,
To lay a timid hand
Upon the wondrous, silken glow,
Of the iridescent band;

I wish I could reach the sunset sky,
Ere the flaming colors wane,
And drift on a cloud ship going by,
Away from sorrow and pain;

So near it seems—with a mighty leap
I'd land on a crimson boat!
Then pink sails spread to the purple sweep,
Out on the deep I would float.

Far off to infinite glory,
Through gates of jasper and gold,
To that land of song and story—
The dream of the ages old!

DEATH

'Tis but an empty house of clay,
from which the soul has fled,
With aching heart we put away
in the City of the Dead;
For far and free, in joyous flight,
a spirit seeks its God
Beyond the ken of mortal sight—
and clod returns to clod.

DAYBREAK

Low in the west hung the silver moon,
The east was pink with dawn,
The soft wind whispered, "Day cometh soon!
A bird sang, "Night is gone!"

The dark shadows trembled, turned, and fled
Away from hill and dale,
The great sun stirred in his ocean bed,
And the moon and stars grew pale.

The living things of the earth bowed low,
As the sun flashed on his way,
They worshipped life in the golden glow,
When night gave place to day.

EVENTIDE

The dewy air is sweet and still,
As shadows slowly creep,
From stately pines that crown the hill,
Down where the flowers sleep.

The sky is flushed with rosy light,
The farewell of the sun,
A low-hung star is gleaming bright,
And day at last is done.

The night wind wafts away to sing
A hymn unto the trees,
And lazy bugs, on fluttering wing,
The dreaming blossoms tease.

The green-banked brook, with soothing hum,
Now rocks the moon's white boat,
Borne on the ripples gaily come
Fair leaves and blooms afloat.

The birds are cuddling down to rest
Where great boughs gently sway,
They softly chirp, high in the nest,
And wait the new-born day.

The children seek their mother's side,
As twilight shades grow deep,
The fragrant dusk floats far and wide—
May God the nightwatch keep!

BEYOND THE PEAKS

What lies beyond the long blue mountain range,
Where snow-capped peaks shine in the west,
That always some enchantment, sweet and strange,
Keeps calling, "Come, this land is best!"

At evening, in the red-gold sunset glow,
The summits glow like jewels rare,
My eager, restless heart cries out, "I know
The land of joy is over there!"

Oft when a winter morn breaks white and cold,
Dawn floods the slopes with opal's fire,
The voice grows louder, ringing clear and bold,
"Fear not, I hold your heart's desire!"

For man grows weary of the cords that bind,
A far, bright place his vision seeks;
Some day I'll climb the shining heights, and find
The golden land beyond the peaks.

ASPIRATION

A MOCKING desert stretching wide,
  A sun that is burning hot,
The last faint vagrant breeze has died,
  And shadow and shade are not.

The heat waves rise, a rippling haze
  From sand and the sagebrush cast,
The lava beds reflect a blaze
  That stings like a furnace blast.

Afar through sun-drenched day loom high
  White peaks in a stainless glow,
How sweet to softly, safely lie
  At ease on the cool, clean snow!

The thought a benediction seems,
  I'm free as a bird, as gay,
I fly my soul where a mountain gleams,
  Lo, the desert fades away!

THE WANDERER

From my camp high on a hill,
Watching in the gray dawn still,
I behold the dark night die,
And day flaunt her rosy sky.

Cool, I feel the winds of space
Blowing briskly on my face,
Through green branches catch the gleam
Of a distant silver stream.

Then I long to mix and run
With the river in the sun,
To become the ground and trees,
The lofty peaks and far-flung breeze.

To blend self into the whole:
While the seasons swiftly roll
Never more to fret and strive—
Simply glad to be alive.

SEA FANCY

A SHIP goes by, white sails that gleam
  Wide-spread in swift-winged flight,
It fades away, a mystic dream
  That drowns in golden light.

Across the sand small shadows wing,
  The gulls are flying low,
Along the shore they dip and swing,
  And breast the winds that blow.

Afar they soar where bright clouds float,
  Now ride the wave's white crest,
And ever rings their plaintive note,
  A cry of vague unrest.

Does each gull bear a sailor's soul,
  Unseen by mortal eye,
From where the mighty breakers roll,
  To mansions in the sky?

CONSOLATION

I STAND alone upon the shore,
And mourn for one who comes no more:

The sun has set, and in the west
Bright cloud ships sail away to rest,
Dim ghosts of dusk, the gulls soar by,
Far stars gleam faintly in the sky,
Borne on the breast of foaming tide
A fair white mist floats far and wide,
The night wind soothes my aching head,
And whispers low, "Peace to thy dead."

And then I know, though grief persists,
Life still is good—for God exists!
All nature speaks the Oversoul,
The Mighty One, Eternal Whole.

IF

If I could only wake
To words, the things I feel,
At moonlight on the lake,
Or in thunder's solemn peal;

If I could thrill with glee
That's in the skylark's note,
As soaring glad and free
He sings where bright clouds float;

If I could grasp the peace,
Serenely flowing by,
When storms abruptly cease,
And stars shine out on high;

If I could humbly stand
By Nature's heart, that hour
She stirs a barren land
To springing grass and flower;

Strange heights my soul I sent,
This answer found afar:
Mere man must be content
To know that these things are.

A PETITION

Let these be mine as life sweeps by;
The rapture that the sweet spring yields,
The peace of silent, sunny fields,
The wonder of the deep blue sky.

I cannot, then, be wholly sad;
If sorrow stalks me through the years,
And grief bedims the eye with tears,
My heart shall still be brave and glad.

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